

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 PA-01 PRS-01 USIE-00 SSO-00 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2467

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR Q

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: SHUM, NU

SUBJECT: RIDING STORY IN NEW YORK TIMES ON NICARAGUA

REF: MANAGUA 541

SUMMARY: EMB CONSIDERS RIDING STORY TO BE ACCURATE REPORTAGE OF INFORMATION HE OBTAINED ON HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN NICARAGUA. HOWEVER, IT UNFORTUNATELY TENDS TO CONFUSE THE TIME FRAMES IN WHICH REPORTED VIOLATIONS OCCURED AND MISSES IMPORTANT QUALIFYING AND CONTRADICTORY INFORMATION. END SUMMARY

1. RIDING STORY IS BASED ON BISHOPS' PASTORAL LETTER (REFTEL) CONVERSATION WITH CAPUCHIN PRIESTS, LAWYER FOR BORGE AND OTHER FSLN MEMBERS, GON OFFICIAL PRESS SPOKESMAN, ROGER BERMUDEZ, AND BACKGROUND DISCUSSIONS WITH AMBASSADOR, AID DIRCTOR, POLOFF AND DEFATT.

2. THE BISHOP'S PASTORAL LETTER WAS MOTIVATED BY SERIOUS CONCERN

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OVER LARGE NUMBER OF CAMPESINOS WHO DISAPPEARED AND PRESUMABLY WERE KILLED EARLY IN 1976. AS REPORTED REFTTEL, THE BISHOPS ACKNOWLEDGE

REPORTS OF SIMILAR INCIDENTS DWINDLED SIGNIFICANTLY AFTER MID-YEAR FOLLOWING EXPRESSIONS OF SERIOUS CONCERN BY EMB AND CHURCH. DELAY IN ISSUING PASTORAL WAS CAUSED LARGELY BY NEED TO FORCE CAPUCHINS TO DEFINE THEIR CONCERN IN TERMS OF VERIFIABLE HUMAN RIGHTS VIO-

LATIONS AND TO TONE DOWN ANTI-GOVERNMENT POLITICAL OVERTONES AND THEREBY MAKE IT A MORE CONSTRUCTIVE PRESSURE ON THE GON. BISHOPS TO WHOM POLOFF SPOKE IN FEBRUARY 1977 REFERRED ONLY TO CONTINUED CONCERN FOR CONTINUING REPORTS OF SOME FURTHER VIOLATIONS. AS THEY ACKNOWLEDGED THE REDUCED RATE OF REPORTED VIOLATIONS, IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT THEY WERE EITHER UNAWARE OF DISCOUNTED REPORTS OF MASS EXECUTIONS IN DECEMBER AND JANUARY. IN ANY CASE, THE PASTORAL WAS ADMITTED BY THE BISHOPS TO HAVE BEEN GENERATED BY CONCERN FOR THE LEVEL OF REPORTED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ABOUT EIGHT MONTHS AGO.

2. OVERLAID ON THE PASTORAL LETTER ARE DESCRIPTIVE REPORTS OF PAST AND PRESENT ABUSES BY THE NATIONAL GUARD (GN) ATTRIBUTED TO THE CAPUCHINS. RIDING HAS THEM CHARGING THAT THE GOVERNMENT "CARRIED OUT EXECUTIONS", USUALLY SHOT SUSPECTED COLLABORATORS IN THE HEAD, BOMBED REMOTE HAMLETS, EXECUTED 44 PERSONS AT VARILLAL AND APPROPRIATED THE LAND, COMMITTED TORTURE, ETC. IN POLOFFS CONVERSATIONS WITH THE SAME PRIESTS THEY STATED THEY HAD HEARD OF THESE THINGS HAPPENING. THEY COULD NOT PERSONALLY CONFIRM THEM THEMSELVES.

3. ANYONE FAMILIAR WITH NICARAGUAN POLITICAL RUMOR MILIEU IS ACUTELY AWARE THAT THERE ARE AS MANY FABRICATED STORIES CIRCULATING AT ANY ONE TIME AS THERE ARE VARIATIONS OF STORIES BASED ON ACTUAL INCIDENTS. MOST OF THESE FABRICATED STORIES AND VARIATIONS ON ACTUAL INCIDENTS ARE CAST IN FORMS DESIGNED TO EMBARRASS THE GOVERNMENT. THEREFORE, EITHER RIDING OR THE CAPUCHINS WERE OVERSTATING THE CASE BY DESCRIBING REPORTS OF GN ABUSES AS VERIFIED VIOLATIONS.

4. THE REFERENCE EARLY IN THE ARTICLE TO TWO MASS EXECUTIONS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INVOLVING A TOTAL OF 86 CIVILIANS IN THE ZELAYA MOUNTAINS AND THE LATER REFERENCE TO 44 EXECUTED AT VARILLAL AND 42 EXECUTED AT KASKITA ARE THE SAME TWO INCIDENTS, NOT FOUR SEPARATE INCIDENTS.

5. RIDING EITHER DID NOT LEARN OR DID NOT REPORT THAT CAPUCHINS ALSO STATE THAT SOME "DISAPPEARED" PEOPLE SUBSEQUENTLY RETURN TO THEIR HOMES AND THAT SOME OF THE KILLED CAMPESINOS ARE KILLED BY THE FSLN GUERRILLAS RATHER THAN THE GN.

6. THE ALLEGATIONS OF TORTURE BY SOME OF THE CAPTURED FSLN MEMBERS HAVE BEEN MADE IN PUBLIC TRIALS AND REPORTED IN LOCAL NEWS-PAPERS. NOT ALL FSLN PRISONERS HAVE ALLEGED TORTURE DESPITE THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO. THIS AND INTERVIEWS WITH OTHERS WHO HAVE BEEN PICKED UP BY THE GN AND INTERROGATED WHO STATED THEY WERE NOT PHYSICALLY ABUSED LEADS EMB TO CONCLUDE THAT TORTURE IS NOT SYSTEMATICALLY USED ON ALL SUSPECTS.

7. COMMENT: RIDING'S STORY WILL AGONIZE THE GON. OFFICIALS WERE ALREADY UPSET THAT THEY HAD TO SEEK HIM OUT TO GIVE HIM THE GON

DENIAL OF REPORTED VIOLATIONS. THE CAPUCHINS' FUTURE IN NICARAGUA HAS BEEN PLACED IN JEOPARDY. FR. FLORIAN RUSKAMP OF THE CAPUCHIN ORDER REPLIED "GOOD" WHEN TOLD BY POLOFF THAT RIDING ARTICLE HAD ATTRIBUTED SOURCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS TO THE ORDER. CAPUCHINS WERE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING WITHDRAWAL FROM NICARAGUA AS EARLY AS LAST AUGUST AS THE RESULT OF THE EXPULSION OF ONE OF THEIR MEMBERS. ACORDINGLY, THEY MAY HAVE BEEN FULLY PREPARED TO RISK EXPULSION. THIS IS A SITUATION WHICH EMB WILL BE MONITORING VERY CLOSELY.
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